



US Ambassador William Brownfield
US Embassy
Bogotá, DC
Colombia

20 March, 2009

Dear Ambassador Brownfield,

We are writing to convey our grave concern regarding the recent threats by illegal armed groups of imminent 'social cleansing' in cities across Colombia. I ask you to please strongly urge the Colombian government to increase protection in all areas where these threats have been received and conduct an investigation and prosecution of those responsible.

Unidentified illegal armed groups thought to be paramilitaries by the recipients of these threats have distributed pamphlets in approximately 20 cities across the country in recent weeks announcing their intentions to eliminate individuals considered 'undesirable' and a danger to society. Amongst those targeted are; sex workers, youths, delinquents, drug users and dealers and the homeless.

Some of the cities where these pamphlets have been distributed include; Buenaventura, Bogotá, Quibdó, Cali, Medellín, Barranquilla, Cartagena, Cúcuta, Sincelejo, Riseralda, Barrancabermeja, Villavicencio, San José del Guaviare, Neiva and La Dorada.

Citizens are at great risk and already several attacks have been reported following the distribution of these pamphlets (see attached sample). Director of the Social Ministry of the Diocese of Quibdó, Luis Carlos Hinojosa, said that at least three people have been assassinated this week and one of them showed signs of torture. Furthermore, he said other young people that disobeyed the paramilitary order to stay indoors after 10pm, were shot at. Cocomacia, an association of Afro-Colombian community councils in Chocó, said that pamphlets have appeared in all of the municipal centers in the state and subsequently seven fishermen were killed in the San Juan region of Chocó. We have heard from other partners that such pamphlets were distributed to IDPs in Tumaco and northern Cauca.

While the Colombian Government insists on denying the continued existence of paramilitary groups, the response to such threats will be insufficient.

I implore you to take the following actions:

1. Call on the Director of the Presidential Program for Human Rights, Dr Carlos Franco Echavarría, to increase protection mechanisms in all areas where such threats have been received.
2. Urge Attorney-General, Dr. Mario Germán Iguarán Arana, to immediately investigate these threats and prosecute those responsible.
3. Ask the Colombian Government to take action to control the expansion of paramilitary activity throughout the country. If these threats are indeed from paramilitary groups then it is imperative that the Colombian authorities take urgent steps to fully dismantle the operational structures (military, social and financial) of such groups.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent issue.

Sincerely,

Kelly Nicholls

Executive Director

US Office on Colombia

Gimena Sanchez-Garzoli

Senior Associate for the Andes

Washington Office on Latin America